

4-18-2018

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Jerry Bowling

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eCommons Citation

Bowling, Jerry, "Where Are You Now? Jerry Bowling III's Story of Reinvention" (2018). *Facing Dayton: Stories*. 33.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/facing_stories/33

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Where Are You Now? Jerry Bowling III's Story of Reinvention

STORYTELLER: Jerry Bowling

Jerry Bowling has lived in McCook Field for nearly all his life and now holds the position of president of the neighborhood association. He has seen the neighborhood change, for better or worse, and the neighborhood has seen Jerry change as well. Jerry's story is one of personal reinvention at a time when the neighborhood itself was being reinvented.

This is McCook Field, not Old North Dayton. I find myself subtly correcting people that aren't from here. We have to have pride in our neighborhood. We have to have pride in ourselves. McCook Field is a working class neighborhood. It's a safe neighborhood too. The housing stock isn't great, but it's being improved. Throughout my life, I've lived on three different blocks and

MCCOOK FIELD



in four different houses. My mom was even born in this neighborhood and wrote a story called, “Memories of McCook Field”. Everybody knew everybody. When I was younger, I delivered newspapers. Now, I pass homes and still think that was the lawnmower man’s house, that’s where the dog-catcher lived, that was the candied apple lady’s house. This neighborhood is my home and my support system.

In 2009, I lost my job as a contractor at Delphi, where I worked for 15 years, after the engineering center closed. That’s a major thing in somebody’s life you know. I did not have a degree. I was a designer by trade. I had to go on unemployment and get a part time job at Kohl’s. Ultimately, I ended up getting two other part time jobs and in 2012, I went to Sinclair to get a two-year degree in engineering. In eighteen months, I had obtained my degree, but it was pretty challenging while working three jobs. I also filed for bankruptcy, probably later than I should have. With all the stress, I began to experience physical issues: you know, having trouble sleeping, discomfort. I had insurance, but it wasn’t great. I went to the hospital on December 30, 2013. They checked my heart out and everything was fine, but \$8,000 later I was left with the consolation prize of high

blood pressure and diabetes. It was just another challenge on top of not having a full time job. Things would get better, though. I was in the process of reinventing myself.

In 2009, McCook Field became a Superfund site because of the Behr Plant contamination. McGuffey School even had to close a week before school started because of the toxicity. They’re remediating the situation now, but it’s an ongoing process. The groundwater is contaminated and moving toward our houses. We have mitigation systems in our homes to keep the air clean and residents are legally obligated to disclose this information to future homebuyers. **REVITALIZATION IS SLOW MOVING, BUT IT TAKES TIME LIKE ANYTHING ELSE. MY SISTER, WHO LIVES ACROSS THE STREET, IS WORKING ON FIXING UP HER HOUSE NOW, AND THE TURKISH IMMIGRANTS FIXED UP THEIRS TOO.** The first major step to reinvention was tearing down the public housing projects, which tainted the reputation of the neighborhood. The second major step was the \$72 million investment in the beautiful Kroc Center, built on a 17 and ½ acre campus. This neighborhood center is only the start of reinvention though. I’m waiting for the next big step.

Financial issues are difficult, but I do have support. At first, there was a lot of shame. It’s

difficult to ask for money. It hurts, but it gets easier even when you don’t want to do it. I had to think alright, who do I go to first? Of my seven brothers and sisters, three helped me big time. For example, I needed a retainer for my lawyer and my brother helped me. **BEING PRESIDENT OF MCCOOK FIELD WAS ANOTHER SORT OF SUPPORT SYSTEM. IT GAVE ME PURPOSE IN MY PERSONAL LIFE.** By giving back to the community and helping others, I helped myself along the way. Every week I would go to the bank to get a money order and the cashiers, which I love, would ask, “Oh, are you getting a money order Jerry?” I was also required to attend a financial class as a result of bankruptcy court. There were so many people there, I realized oh, okay I’m not alone. In 2014, I finally got a job. It was a three-month internship. It was something, and in my field so I was excited about that. I was asked to stay longer and then eventually hired. Now, I’m approaching three years employment and I have good insurance. I’m reestablishing myself, but it’s an ongoing challenge. I make three quarters of what I used to, but I have to make the best of it whether I like it or not.

WHERE AM I NOW? This past spring, I was discharged from bankruptcy after four years instead of the standard five. I didn’t know why,

but I didn’t question it either. I went back to the bank and as usual they asked if I was getting a money order. This time I proudly said no. After my dissolution from my wife, I moved back into the house we used to rent out, next to my parents. The mortgage was paid off a few months later. Talk about being excited. I was finally able to start saving some money and start paying back debts. I even got to buy more presents at Christmas time. I’ve learned that recovery is tenuous though. The engine recently went out on my truck and my credit was not good enough to get a reasonable loan. Luckily, a friend loaned me a vehicle to use until my credit improves.

So, you know, one thing can set you back again when money is tight. I worry about medical things and how far away work is, but I’m in the process of recovery. There are steps to progress and support helps. I can’t give up hope. I have to keep plugging away.